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50% downtime, half as many pilots



Saab said in [one of its full-page ads](#) in the Czech media this month that the Gripen E has "half the operating costs and much higher operational availability." A [report last Thur.](#) by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) makes it clearer what the Swedes were getting at. The GAO, which is similar to the Czech NKÚ audit office, reported that the air-vehicle availability rate for the United States' F-35 fleet was 51% in March 2023 and that the mission-capable rate was about 55%. The GAO also highlighted the estimated life-cycle cost of \$1.7 trillion for the U.S.'s planned 2,500 F-35s in then-dollars, of which \$1.3tr is associated with operating and sustaining the aircraft. That works out to \$680m per jet, or about Kč 15.5bn in crowns. This is in the same ballpark as the [Kč 400bn figure](#) quoted recently in Parliament by Andrej Babiš for the 24 jets that Petr Fiala wants to buy. It's a lot of money, but Fiala can take some comfort in knowing that the army will only need about half as many F-35 pilots.

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